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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REPORT: INDIAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S 100 DAYS IN OFFICE, AND APRIL 29 PRESS CONFERENCE

**SUMMARY:** President Barack Obama's April 29 press conference to mark the completion of 100 days in office generated substantial reporting and commentary in the Indian media. Overall coverage was positive with occasional commentary skeptical of the impact of the Obama Administration so early in its tenure. Reports highlighted the President's remarks that the Pakistani military is beginning to realize that its obsession with India is misplaced. THE TIMES OF INDIA lauded the remark, saying: "Obama has called a spade a spade." Mumbai based DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS said, "Americans pick up lessons only when their own national interests require it." HINDUSTAN Hindi daily said the President's observation seemed to have "cut ice with Islamabad," in that it subsequently withdrew its forces from the Indian border. Lauding the President's 100 days in office, THE TELEGRAPH said "the United States of America is a very different place today." THE DECCAN CHRONICLE commented that on foreign policy, President Obama had passed "with flying colors." The ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA Bengali daily said it was too early to discuss the effectiveness of the President's policies, "but his vision is praiseworthy." An op-ed in the influential SIASAT Urdu daily lauded the President's "humane qualities and respect for human values." Two top television channels displayed skepticism, however. The NDTV channel said "Obama's initial momentum seems to have hit a wall." The CNN-IBN channel said the President's policies "are yet to have an impact." END SUMMARY.

-- NEWS REPORTS HIGHLIGHT "OBSESSION" REMARK:

¶1. President Obama's April 29 press conference generated widespread reporting in India the next day. The media highlighted his remark: "On the military side you're starting to see some recognition just in the last few days, that the obsession with India as the mortal threat to Pakistan has been misguided, and that their biggest threat right now comes internally." On May 2, THE HINDU reported that President Obama's remarks have caused concern in Islamabad that Washington is building up the military at the expense of the civilian government. On May 3, THE TIMES OF INDIA reported the U.S. Administration went into damage control mode Saturday, assuaging Islamabad's concerns.

-- "A FATAL OBSESSION" - THE TIMES OF INDIA

¶2. The President's completion of 100 days in office generated editorial commentary in several important dailies. Following is an excerpt from an editorial in May 2 centrist, independent THE TIMES OF INDIA English daily: (BEGIN EXCERPT) US president Barack Obama articulated, in no uncertain terms, that Islamabad's obsession with India as the mortal threat to Pakistan has been misguided. He asserted that the real threat to Pakistan lay within. Successive administrations in Washington over the past 60 years chose not to point out this fact to Islamabad. It's welcome news, therefore, that Obama has called a spade a spade, an indication perhaps of the different lens

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through which he views geopolitics today.

¶3. Meanwhile, about 6,000 troops on Pakistan's eastern border with India have been pulled back and redeployed to fight the Taliban in Buner. This is perhaps the consequence of some tough talk emanating from Washington secretary of state Hillary Clinton ticked off Islamabad not long ago but it was also done with an eye on securing the aid package that America is expected to give Pakistan...." (END EXCERPT)

-- "AN INDIA OBSESSION" - DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS

¶4. Following are excerpts from an editorial in May 2 Western India circulating centrist English newspaper DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) Now finally Barack Obama has articulated what should have been obvious all along: Pakistan's obsession with India is misplaced. All these decades, the US establishment was content to go along with this obsession, during the Cold War and much, much beyond. This made south Asia a brittle security zone through the military and financial aid that Pakistan got from the US. As a matter of fact, American view of India was shaped by Pakistan's perceptions.

¶5. Americans pick up lessons only when their own national interests require it. The United States' national interests now demand that Islamabad should focus on the Taliban/al Qaeda - the mortal enemies of the Americans in the present world situation - and not perceive India as the enemy. Washington has been therefore hammering home the point to the generals in Islamabad - the Americans understand that it is the generals who matter most in Pakistan - that the obsession with India must go. (END EXCERPTS)

-- "OBAMA NEEDS A RETHINK ON PAK" - ASIAN AGE

¶6. Following are excerpts from an editorial in May 2 nationally circulating centrist English newspaper ASIAN AGE: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) At his press conference earlier this week to mark his first 100 days at the White House, US President Barack Obama made two significant observations in respect of our part of the world, which

looms large on Washington's radar screen. The two are inter-related. They privilege the Pakistan Army and undercut the elected government. One suggests that Pakistan's civilian government is not up to scratch....

¶7. Mr Obama also reinforces his trust in the generals on the question of Pakistan's nuclear assets.... The effect, the tenor, and the meaning of the President's observations - made without prevarication - suggest the pivotal role assigned to the Pakistan Army in America's AfPak policy.

(END EXCERPT)

-- "TROUBLE AND ADVICE" - HINDUSTAN HINDI daily

¶8. Excerpt from an editorial in May 2 national centrist

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Hindi newspaper HINDUSTAN: "President Obama's advice that Pakistan's allegations against India were baseless seems to have cut ice with Islamabad. This is evident from the fact that soon after Obama made his statement in a press conference, Pakistan withdrew the Army from the Indian border and deployed it on the western region. But does this mean Pakistan has accepted that its real enemy is not India, but Islamic fanaticism? Or is it simply a drama to extract economic aid before Zardari's U.S. visit?"

-- "A HUNDRED DAYS" - THE TELEGRAPH

¶9. Following are excerpts from an analysis in April 29 eastern India circulating centrist English daily THE TELEGRAPH by Washington correspondent K.P. Nayar: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) "What a difference a hundred days can make! The United States of America is a very different place today... In Obama's America, a woman can sue and hope to win her case if she is discriminated against at work: George W. Bush had made it difficult. Millions of parents go to sleep easy at night in Obama's America because the healthcare that was denied to their children by Bush has been made available..."

¶10. Obama has kindled hopes in hundreds of thousands of Americans...that stem cell research that Bush banned and Obama has allowed may eventually bring cure for diseases like Alzheimer's. It is something that cannot be explained easily. It can only be felt when one lives in the US through the changes that the new occupant of the White House is initiating... Obama allows his motorcade to block traffic and zip through streets only when he is out on official business. Such gestures, albeit small, have a cascading effect... If nothing else, that is the change that makes the last hundred days in America worth living through." (END EXCERPTS)

-- "PROMISES TO KEEP" - THE TELEGRAPH:

¶11. Following are excerpts from an editorial in April 29 THE TELEGRAPH: (BEGIN EXCERPTS) "It is clear that Mr. Obama aims to build a new America, more caring, more humane and more accountable... What is alarming is that the economy is yet to respond to the money that has been injected. There is no positive result in Afghanistan, especially with developments in Pakistan completely out of control. Policy-makers in India...are beginning to wonder if the world's superpower, under a new president, will actually act like one in Pakistan. The signs are confusing..."

¶12. His noble vision of a nuclear weapons-free world will come to naught if mullahs and generals, with not-so-covert support from the US, continue to threaten India's north-western borders. Mr. Obama has promises to keep within the US and elsewhere too. There is no bigger disappointment than promises without delivery." (END

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"CANDLE SHINES ON 100TH DAY, OBAMA'S MAGIC STILL WORKS" -  
- Op-Ed in DECCAN CHRONICLE

¶13. Excerpt from an op-ed by political columnist Kishwar Desai in May 2 South India circulating left-of-center English daily DECCAN CHRONICLE: (BEGIN EXCERPT) "Mr. Obama has passed with flying colors on foreign policy and demolished the fear that his selection of Hillary Clinton would end up dividing the White House. However, the best part of Mr. Obama's presidency seems to be that he had made the Americans feel good about themselves all over again - despite all the problems they face. His desire to engage the world in a conversation, even inviting 'enemy' states such as Iran for a dialogue, has greatly improved the image of America abroad." (END EXCERPT)

"100 DAYS" - DECCAN HERALD

¶14. Excerpt from an editorial in May 02, South India circulating, left-of-center English daily DECCAN HERALD: "No other U.S. President in recent history had to face so many national and international challenges on stepping into office. The promise of change on which he was elected added to the baggage of expectations. Since the agenda was huge only the beginnings of a new course could be indicated in a few weeks, and he has been able to outline its nature in more concrete shape than when he campaigned for a new America."

"OBAMA 100" -- ANANDABAZAR PATRIKA:

¶15. Excerpt from an editorial in April 30 eastern India circulating centrist Bengali daily ANANDA BAZAR PATRIKA: "The time is not yet ripe to discuss the effectiveness of President Obama's policies, but his vision is praiseworthy. The courage he has been showing through different initiatives is indeed laudable. American conservatism in economic and foreign policies is well known. Obama's achievements on these issues have assumed a historic dimension in his first hundred days."

-- COMMENTARY IN THE URDU PRESS

¶16. Columnist Ahsan Lateef, writing in India's number one Urdu daily SIASAT May 3, compared President Obama's policies with the policies under previous administrations. He said, "Now that the reins of the U.S. Administration have been taken over by Barack Obama, it can be expected that the world will again see the peaceful face of American policies which are based on the President's humane qualities and respect for human values."

¶17. The writer commended the President's decision to close Guantanamo, his choice of people for important offices in his administration, including "experienced Jews and Indians," setting up the Office of Religious Partnerships, and the appointment of the "Muslim Egyptian woman to represent Muslims." The op-ed concluded with the hope that the Obama administration will help in

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"spreading peace in the world and reducing the poison against Muslims and Islam, across the world."

-- "REPORT CARD FOR OBAMA'S PAKISTAN POLICY" - NDTV

¶18. Reporting on the presidential press conference, the NDTV 24-hour English news channel said, "On the 100th day in office the Obama administration is getting applause

from the media and the public on most fronts but his lowest grades, if experts are to be believed, are on his Pakistan policy. Within days of being sworn in, President Obama had developed a comprehensive plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan and appointed Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to be the region's Special Representative. But 100 days later, Obama's initial momentum seems to have hit a wall." Another popular channel CNN-IBN said President Obama's policies "are yet to have an impact."

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